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that is brought to them. One mother will cook for them in the morning and another in the afternoon and they will take it in turns to provide their sons with food, but what each brings is shared by all and not eaten by her son alone. The mothers themselves bring the food to the hut in which the boys are confined unless they have *ther*, are ritually unclean. If one mother has much milk from the cows of her homestead she will bring it to the boys, while if another cannot procure milk she will make up for her poverty in this respect by supplying plenty of corn for their meals. During the period of their seclusion the boys are restricted to soft food that can be easily swallowed, such as milk and flour paste, but a soft corn mash and even soft and finely chopped meat (*mig ma kochoc*) is allowed them in Lou and Jekany countries. These eatables do not require mastication, a muscular exertion that might cause the veins to break again. Father Crazzolara writes of the West Bank Nuer that the boys are confined for two months and that for the first fortnight no food other than milk and milk mixed with flour is allowed to them.[1] I do not think that this is the case among the Lou and Jekany tribes where the boys eat porridge and soft meat at the commencement of their seclusion and where the period of confinement to their hut does not last for more than a week to a fortnight. During this time they may not wash their faces. After about a week they are allowed to sit up but must remain quietly in a single sitting position. After a few more days they are considered to be healed even though their wounds have not yet closed. Not all the boys heal at the same time: some are healed at the end of a fortnight while others only after a couple of months. When they are allowed to come out of their hut they sit by the door in the evenings and annoint their foreheads with oil and sleep with them oiled. They wake before dawn and wash their foreheads with warm water and then one of the men who is looking after them cleans out clotted blood from the cuts. They then sit and shiver in front of their hut while the cold north wind blows into the wounds and causes them to cicatrise.

Apparently it is between the time when they are well enough to leave the hut and the day on which they are ritually cleansed by bathing in a river that they are considered to enter into a period of mildly prescribed licence. They still avoid contact with the cattle and spend their time wandering about in bands in neighbouring gardens and bush. In Lek country at this time they wear a special cord, called *kareth*, around their

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 32. "Mit der Milch wird allmählich etwas Mehl vermischt und zu einem flüssigen Brei gekocht; dieser Brei und Milch sind für ein paar Wochen ihres einzige Kost. Etwas Fleischbrühe und allenfalls ganz fein gekochtes Fleisch kann später dazu kommen."

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881 •786 necks but this is not the custom in Lou country. On both sides of the Nile, however, they carry a special stick, called *rir*. In Lou country the boys wear a special necklace of *heac* beads. During this period the boys are allowed to behave in a manner that would not be tolerated at ordinary times. If they meet uninitiated boys in the gardens they set upon them and flog them with their neck cords or sticks and tear their flesh with thorns. An uninitiated boy, Tot, showed me scars on his body which had resulted from this treatment. They also beat girls whom they meet but generally they give them the choice of being beaten or submitting to sexual intercourse (*mekeni ngoth kie mekeni dwac*). A party of boys will meet a single girl or several girls together and compel them to submit to intercourse. I was told also that if they meet a dog they may kill it. They are not answerable for any of these irregularities for they are now in a special state in which they are known as *cōtni* and it is the privilege of *cōtni* to act in these ways. Nevertheless they do not molest initiated men but only boys who do not bear the marks of manhood, and girls.

881 One morning, early, an old woman goes into their hut (*dwil cōtni*) and beats the boys out of it with a bunch of green grass. Occasionally this takes place in the evening. They run out of the hut into the gardens where a crowd of people, consisting mainly of women, pelt them with cattle dung (*buk ka wār*). They run down to a neighbouring stream to wash themselves and on their return to the homestead may beat the cattle with wild rice (*poon*). They then go and rub themselves in their beloved ashes and sprawl in contentment around the dung fires. They spend the rest of the day leaping behind the bullocks given them by their fathers and maternal uncles.

I am not certain that I have recorded these events in their correct order and it is possible that the cleansing ceremony takes place earlier than I believe. There is also later a concluding ceremony at which a big dance takes place (*ba ruath pwoc*) and there is general merriment and much duelling. The people who take part in these festivities are members of the age-sets of the fathers of the boys, and their wives, for the boys themselves tour the neighbourhood to ask for presents of giraffe hair and beads and other ornaments from their relatives. At the conclusion of this ceremony a boy's maternal uncle may demand from his father a cow (*yang gārā*, 'the cow of initiation) on the grounds that his sister's son has now reached manhood. Before the cutting takes place a maternal uncle rubs his sister's son with ashes (*buk*) and makes an address over him (*lam*) so that he will pass through the ordeal without difficulty.

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of the lad belonging to their family. Age-mates are those who naturally associate together in any society in the world. Father Crazzolara writes "A kind of relationship springs up between the *Ric*-comrades, akin to close comradeship. According to the views of the people they belong to one another. When they live together or meet by chance, the meals prepared for the one or the other are eaten in common. In travelling *Ric*-comrades are natural hosts."[1] A man may address a fellow member of his *ric*, his age-set, as *ricda*, *da* being a suffix meaning "my."

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Apart from this general pattern of egalitarian behaviour between members of the same age-set, their like mode of behaviour towards members of other age-sets, their common title, and their exogamous relations, there are a number of customs that ritually express their equality. The chief of these is the strict prohibition on any member of a dead man's age-set of partaking of the flesh of a beast killed at his mortuary ceremony. Anyone who broke this rule would inevitably die of *nuer*, the punishment which falls on those who break serious taboos.

Another custom allows a man of your age-set to ask you if anyone has claimed your daughter's eldest cow, and if you reply that no one has claimed it he will take a bracelet from off his arm and place it on the little girl's leg. When she is married he will then be entitled to claim the *yang rica*, "the beast of the age-set." It is important to note this custom in its relation to the rule that a man must not marry the daughter of an age-mate since the acceptance of any part of bride-wealth is recognition of an exogamous relationship between the people concerned. Further customs that express the social equivalence of age-mates are the rule which says that when two members of the same age-set have adjoining gardens they shall not erect the usual boundary-line of raised earth between them, and the custom which says that if a youth gets a thorn under his finger nail and has to cut it out all members of his age-set who are present ought also to cut off the tip of a toe nail as well. As we have seen at initiation feasts a man is permitted to joke and take liberties with the wife of a man of his own age-set. She is not a possible future mother-in-law, since a man cannot marry a daughter of an age-mate, whereas the

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[1] *Op. cit.* p. 38. "Zwischen den *Ric*genossen entsteht eine Art Verwandtschaft, zumindest eine enge Kameradschaft. Beim Herumziehen, auf Reisen, gehen Leute desselben *ric* womöglich zusammen. Wo sie zusammen wohnen oder zufällig zusammen treffen, wird das vorgelegte Essen des einen oder anderen immer gemeinsam genommen. Auf Reisen sind *Ric*genossen die natürlichen Gastgeber."